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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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9 March 1967

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Information as of 1600

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HIGHLIGHTS

The Constituent Assembly has completed its work on all but the final chapter of the constitution.

There are some indications that a record amount of supplies may enter the Laos panhandle from North Vietnam during the 1966-67 dry season.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Motion pictures captured by US forces in Operation JUNCTION CITY have identified three North Vietnamese general officers reviewing Viet Cong forces (Paras. 1-5).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Constituent Assembly has now completed its work on all but the final chapter of the constitution (Paras. 1-4). The Viet Cong have predictably denounced and threatened to "smash" the government's upcoming local elections (Para. 5). Saigon is now beginning to experience an expected short-term rice shortage (Paras. 6-7).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Soviet President Podgorny has charged Peking with opposing DRV Foreign Minister Trinh's "proposal" that talks with the US "could" begin if attacks on the North were stopped unconditionally (Paras. 1-3).

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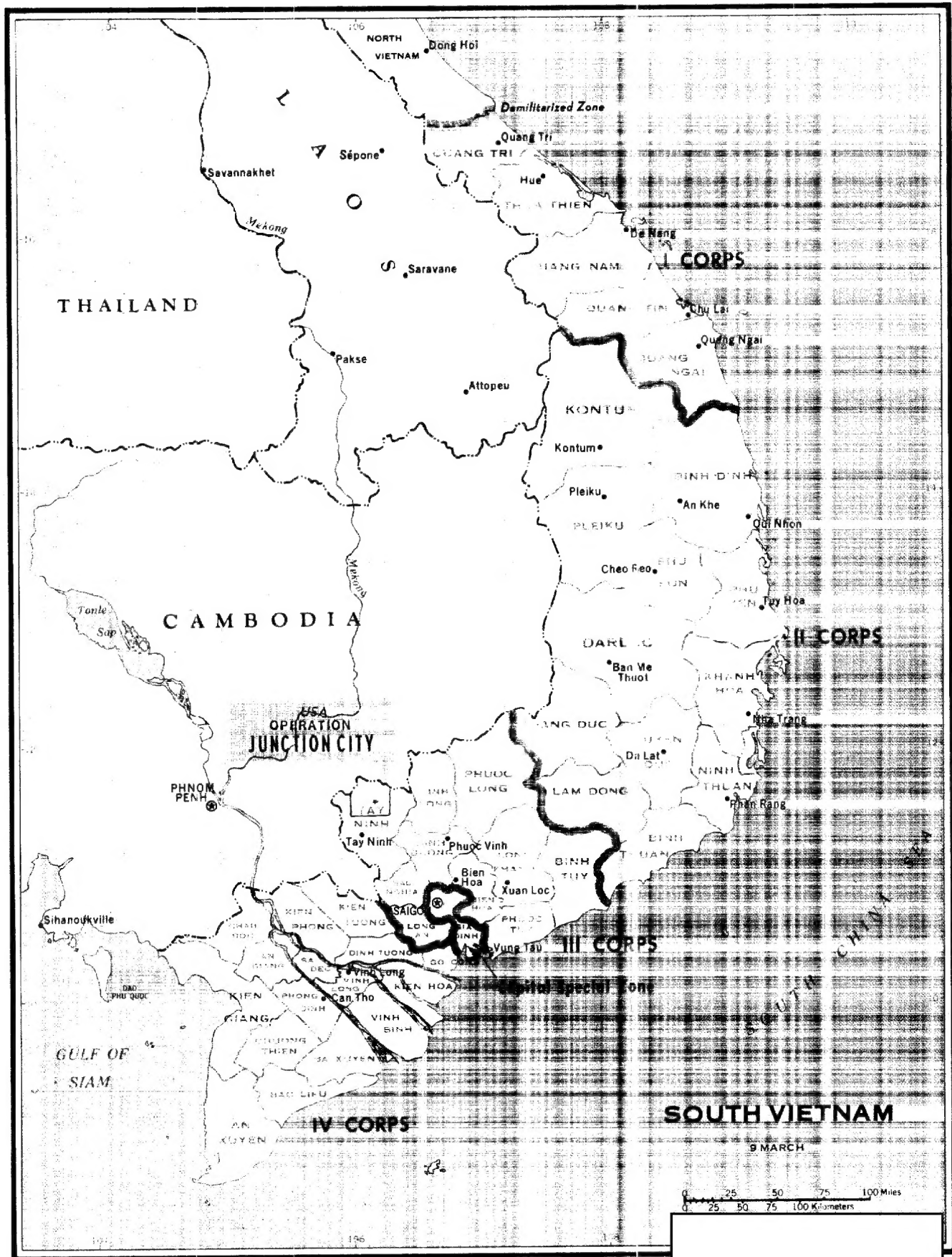
VI. Other Major Aspects: A record amount of supplies from North Vietnam may enter the Laos panhandle during the 1966-67 dry season (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. US forces conducting Operation JUNCTION CITY in northern Tay Ninh Province have captured motion pictures which show three officers inspecting Viet Cong troops and installations. The three have been identified [redacted] as North Vietnamese generals Nguyen Chi Thanh, Tran Do, and Tran Van Tra. The films are not yet available in Washington.

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2. All three generals have been reported in South Vietnam for some time. [redacted]

[redacted] Thanh is the head of the Central Office for South Vietnam, the major Communist political and military command center in the South. [redacted] Tran Do was Thanh's deputy for political affairs and that Tran Van Tra was his deputy for military affairs.

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3. Nguyen Chi Thanh is a senior general in the North Vietnamese Army--the only man other than Vo Nguyen Giap to hold that rank. He is also a full member of the Vietnam Workers Party (VWP) politburo.

[redacted] indicate that Thanh arrived in South Vietnam from Hanoi some time in early 1965 to take command of Communist forces in the South.

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4. Tran Do is a major general in the North Vietnamese Army and an alternate member of the VWP central committee. The date of his arrival in South Vietnam is unknown. One report claims that Do uses the pseudonym Truong Son. Several important articles on the war in the South have appeared in the Vietnamese Communist press under the pseudonym Truong Son.

5. Tran Van Tra is also a major general in the North Vietnamese Army and an alternate member of the VWP central committee. He has been reported by various sources to have been in South Vietnam since 1964. Several sources have stated that Tra uses the name Tran Nam Trung. Tran Nam Trung is listed by the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam as a vice chairman of the Front central committee and as chairman of the Front military affairs committee.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Constituent Assembly is nearing the end of its constitution drafting duties. In sessions on 7 and 8 March, the assembly with little controversy completed work on chapters seven and eight, which deal respectively with the establishment of political parties and the constitutional amending process. On 9 March, the assembly began debate on the constitution's final chapter, which concerns transitional arrangements from the time the constitution is promulgated until an elected government actually takes office.

2. This final chapter may well become the subject of some controversy. As the assembly's working draft now stands, legislative powers spelled out by the constitution will be assumed during the transition period by the Constituent Assembly, which will have particular responsibilities for drafting electoral laws and for regulating the election of the first president and vice president. The ruling Directorate and cabinet of the present government would assume constitutional executive powers during this same period. The final chapter in the assembly's working draft also contains a timetable for establishing the new government which varies from that already decreed by the military government.

3. It is not yet clear whether the assembly will modify any of the main provisions in this draft chapter, or whether the government will accept the assembly's final provisions on the transition period. Both assembly and government sources have indicated that some kind of transitional role will be agreed upon for the assembly, provided it "cooperates" with the government on other constitutional issues. Assembly leaders and government representatives have been meeting privately from time to time to work out differences between the assembly's working draft and the views of the military leaders. The assembly has modified its working draft on several important issues to satisfy the Directorate, although it has not implemented all the suggestions made by the military leaders.

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4. After the assembly completes its work on this chapter, it will probably hold a general debate on the constitution as a whole, and may reconsider some individual provisions before taking a final vote on the entire constitution. The constitution will then be presented to the Directorate for its consideration before actual promulgation. The Directorate retains the power to veto or amend provisions to which it objects, although this veto power can be overridden by a two-thirds majority of the assembly.

Viet Cong Denounce and Threaten Local Elections

5. On 6 March, the Viet Cong broadcast their initial radio propaganda commentary on the government's upcoming local elections, which they described alternately as a "ridiculous farce," "deceitful comedy," and "evil plot." This attitude is largely similar to the Viet Cong position on last year's Constituent Assembly elections, including a threat to "smash" the local elections.

Short-Term Rice Crisis

6. Saigon is beginning to experience a short-term crisis stemming from a shortage of rice. Since the beginning of March, rice prices have been rising daily by about one piaster per kilogram. By 6 March the price of the cheapest type of rice was 2,800 piasters per 100 kilograms compared with 2,100 piasters a week earlier and with 1,500 piasters at the beginning of this year. Rice stocks in Saigon on 8 March amounted to only 14,000 tons compared with about 90,000 tons a year ago. Moreover, deliveries of rice from the delta to Saigon during February amounted to only 17,500 tons, or about 12,000 tons below deliveries during February 1966.

7. The US Embassy warned last December that a shortage of rice could develop at this time, but GVN

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arrangements for imports of additional rice were not made soon enough to cover this critical period. Some imported rice is now arriving, however, and GVN officials are beginning to institute emergency distribution measures. About 12,500 tons of rice were unloaded in Saigon during the first week of March and about 37,000 tons more should be unloaded by the end of the month. In order to bolster confidence, there are plans to conduct a vigorous press campaign to dramatize scheduled ship arrivals and publicize the amount of rice that the GVN plans to import during the remainder of 1967. The US Embassy expects that current needs can be met and that current stocks will be replenished during the remainder of the month.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Soviet President Podgorny openly charged on 9 March that Peking has opposed the "proposal" by North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Trinh that talks with the US "could" begin if attacks on the North were stopped unconditionally.

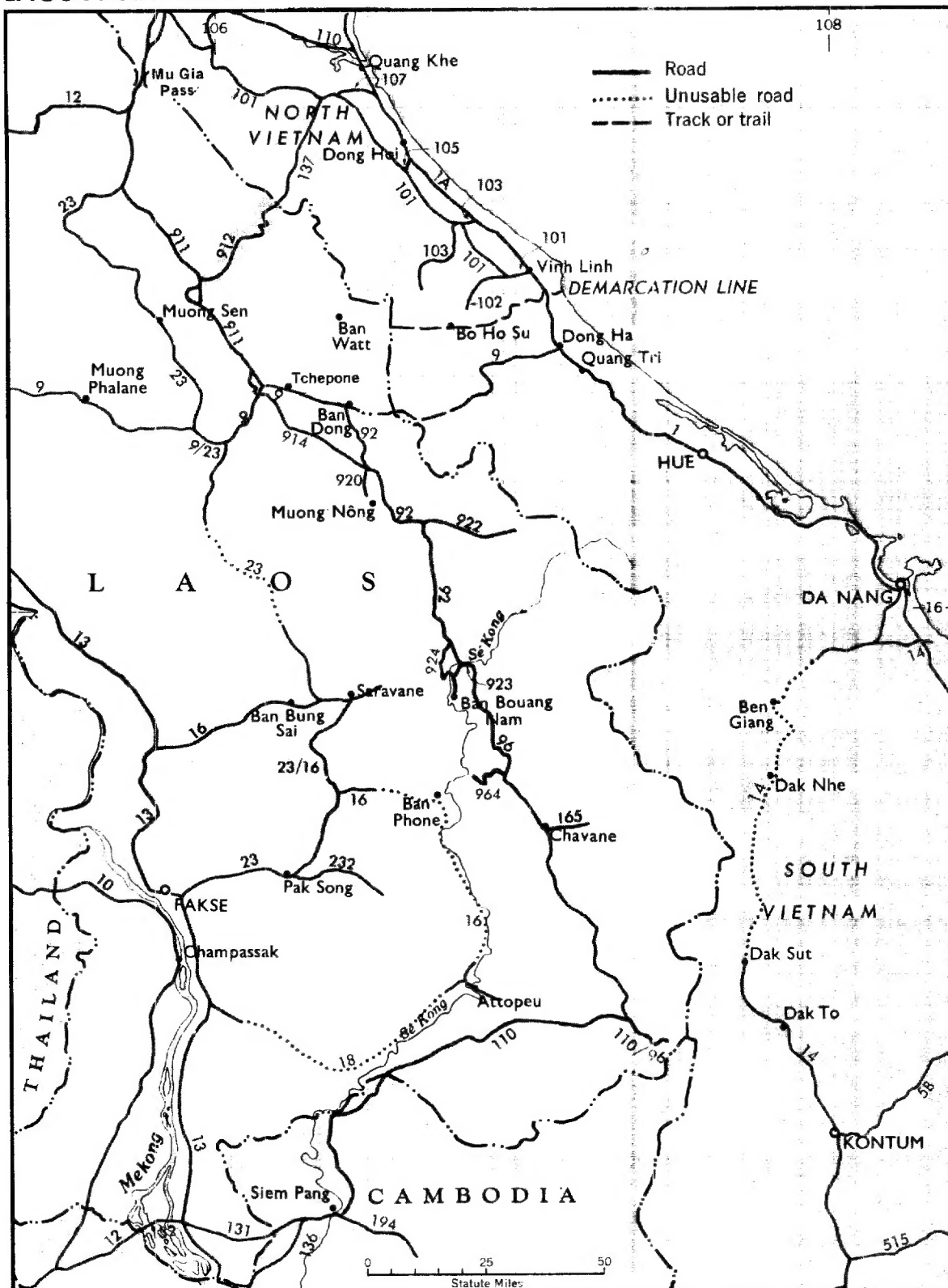
2. Podgorny cited China's failure to mention Trinh's initiative as proof that Peking's policy on the war "does not accord with the views of the DRV Government." His remarks took a step further Kosygin's comment on 6 March that China's intransigent position "actually coincides with that of the American ruling circles."

3. Podgorny's speech marks an unusually authoritative and specific Soviet allusion to differences between Peking and Hanoi on tactics on the war. He included a ritualistic attack on US "hypocrisy" in its declared desire for a peaceful settlement. His comments also appear intended to convey the implication that Chinese pressure on North Vietnam has been to an appreciable extent responsible for precluding any genuine move by Hanoi toward a peaceful settlement of the war.

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LAOS PANHANDLE



VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. [REDACTED] indicates that a relatively large amount of supplies are being moved from North Vietnam into the Laos panhandle. It is estimated that if the level of traffic entering by way of Mu Gia Pass from October through 21 February is maintained to the end of the current dry season in mid-June, about 20,000 tons will be moved into the panhandle compared with estimates of 17,000 tons during the previous dry season and 6,000 tons two dry seasons ago.

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2. The daily average of trucks entering the Laos panhandle by way of Mu Gia Pass this dry season has been 20--excluding Tet-truce traffic--compared with 28 during the last season, but traffic began earlier this season and larger trucks are being used. No information is available on traffic entering the panhandle by way of the new Route 912.

3. It is estimated that 7,000 tons could have reached the South Vietnam border during the previous dry season and 900 tons two dry seasons ago after deducting consumption within the Laos panhandle and--in 1966--losses from air attacks. It is not possible to estimate the tonnage being moved through the panhandle to South Vietnam from the reporting available thus far this dry season.

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